

CREATION OF A GREY KNOWLEDGE DATABASE FOR ASSISTING AGRO- PROCESSING SMMES

FINAL REPORT

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PROJECT ALIGNED TO: PSG 1 – 4, specifically future manufacturing prospects, the food/
water/ energy nexus and also skills development.

A. ABSTRACT

Often expertise is required that is not readily available to food related SMMEs in the Province. Either that, or such expertise is expensive to acquire or employ. Most company policies, including smaller and larger food manufacturing/ processing companies, have employment policies which compels retirement when an employee reaches a certain age e.g. 65. Such employees have a vast knowledge about the existing technical challenges which companies face. The Western Cape Provincial Government (WCPG) had identified agri-processing as a priority area for development. There is a shortage of good consultants and the idea of tapping into this “grey knowledge” pool made business sense. Such experts will thus be tasked to assist small to medium food-related industries. To date the project coordinator has met with the various players in the field including its WCPG partner. An appropriate consultant had been appointed, policies and procedures written as part of the founding framework and the sourcing of candidates started. An advert was placed soon to attract further candidates toward testing the process on a small scale. A database had been compiled based on vetting of appropriate retired consultants. This database was used to trial the process of assisting SMMEs. AN additional but unplanned outcome of the project was the interest generated among younger consultants who wished to be part of the database. This is described in this final report.

B. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT AIMS/ QUESTIONS

Often expertise is required that is not readily available to food related SMMEs in the Province. Either that, or such expertise is expensive to acquire or employ. Most company policies, including smaller and larger food manufacturing/ processing companies, have employment policies which compels retirement when an employee reaches a certain age e.g. 65. In today’s world 65 is not “old” and such employees leave with a valuable set of skills and also embedded experiential knowledge. Some end up doing consulting work if there are no encumbrances in terms of their previous employers. The latter presents as a source of researchable problems which, in some cases, may have preconceived solutions not yet put into practice.

In this project the SMME food industry and retired experts in this broad field are the target. These retired persons are ripe for adding value to the work of others in this phase of their lives. The project is to be formalised by developing an appropriate framework of policies and procedures and also an innocuous reward system that has mutual benefits. Such experts will thus be tasked to assist small to medium food-related industries on a *pro bono* basis or based on a small stipend or possible travel opportunities paid for by the project or by whichever entity eventually operates this as a business, whether commercial or not for profit.

The project will deliver:

- A framework against which this initiative will operate;
- Partners in WCPG and other public/ private entities with related or synergistic interests;
- A contractual process to “buy in” the assistance of retired experts;
- A trial process to affirm validity of assumptions made;
- A proposed process to formalise this by either running it from CPU/ ATS or by partnering with appropriate entities to the good of the industry.

C. PROJECT OUTPUTS AND FINDINGS

Main Outputs Achieved:

Project documentation had been designed to match an operating framework. These include:

1. *Scenarios for a future formalised organisation:*

A variety of scenarios that may suit a future (and better) exploitation of a properly developed and documented database of professionals were explored. The most obvious model at this point is PUM (Netherlands) but, in its existing form, PUM may be a bridge too far at this point.

Once a database is in place, the first user and manager of such will be the Agrifood Technology Station with continued input from the Western Cape Provincial Government as required. As it develops further and as other funders and partners may arise, this may change by mutual agreement and within the internal policies and procedures of each potential partner/ funder prevailing. A potential partnership with the Innovation Mapping project of the Cape Chamber of Commerce & Industry seems a good partner or manager of the database.

2. *Request for proposals for a consultant:*

This spelt out the qualities and activities required of a consultant to assist with the database and included:

- ✓ Provide advisory input to the development of policies, processes and documentation for the project.
- ✓ Assist with identifying agencies/ institutions/ companies who could supply the detail of retired food industry candidates for the proposed database.
- ✓ Procure sufficient candidate details to ensure 50 will be suitable for enlisting.
- ✓ Interview candidates with a view to listing 50 on the database.
- ✓ Report on all findings to the Project Manager as and when they arise.
- ✓ Advisory on a possible model for using the database as a tool for an NPO or a government sponsored entity to assist local entrepreneurs.

3. *Description of what is meant by a “Retired Food Professional”:*

A clear understanding of what this means was necessary for the purposes of the project to ensure that the correct persons were approached and recruited. This was used successfully in advertising and recruiting consultants (see below).

4. *Call for services – Retired Food Professionals*

This document was the basis for an advert using social media. This called on candidates to apply for listing on the database. The key elements of the advert included the following:

- ✓ The process for registration;
- ✓ How the system would operate;
- ✓ Conditions of service as a consultant;
- ✓ How to initiate registration.

Adverts were placed in two different trade media viz. Food & Beverage Reporter (a digital and print magazine with a continental footprint) as well as an e-zine called [Foodstuff SA](#).

5. Protocol for vetting future consultants

A loose protocol for conducting interviews with prospective professionals was developed and applied. However, it turned out that “paperwork” is anathema to retired persons, especially if it was not a “fillable form”. In the end, the vetting process was completed using a range of means i.e. CVs, completed paper-based forms, telephone and e-mail chats. Because potential consults responded from all over the country, and even South Africans in Australia and France (one from each), very little travel was done to do the vetting.

6. Guidance for question to be posed to potential candidates

A standard questionnaire was designed and which will be used by the vetting agent on behalf of the project. This allows for a uniform set of responses to be used to appoint, register and/or nominate an expert for an SMME. See comments above

7. Non-disclosure agreement

CPUT uses a standard non-disclosure agreement which was adopted as part of the operating procedure for the project. This is used to protect all parties involved i.e. CPUT, consultants and recipient SMMEs alike.

8. Memorandum of Agreement

A standard CPUT MoA was adopted as part of the operating procedure for the project. This will be used both between CPUT and consultant and also, if needed, between the consultant and the recipient SMME.

In terms of further documentation for operating the system, a draft Non-disclosure Agreement had been designed via the Technology Transfer Office Contracts Manager. In addition, a generic Memorandum of Agreement had also been drafted with the same entity. These two documents will be signed between prospective candidates identified as well as possibly also between clients and prospective candidates where such is required.

To date, five meetings were held as follows:

- With Mr. Goodwell Dingaen, the Western Cape Provincial Government partner (Department of Economic Development & Tourism) to intimations of a number of items on the work breakdown structure on 25th May 2018. A commitment was made to ensuring frequent feedback as to project progress and direction
- With a Western Cape Fine Food Initiative (WCFFI) delegation led by outgoing CEO Mr. Nazeem Sterras on 21st May 2018. As much as this meeting had a specific mandate, there was a two-fold contribution to the CHEC-funded project. In the first instance, WCFFI is a potential partner/ consulting agent toward the completion of this project. Significant synergy was identified between the parties and also some learnings that one could take from WCFFI and implement as part of this project. The second benefit is specified under a separate bullet below.

- Part of the delegation referred to above was Mr. Lesley Africa, previously of the Western Cape Business Opportunities Forum (WECBOF) and now a local representative of PUM, the Dutch organisation running something similar to, but much more complex than, the final output of this project. It was agreed that as this project advances, input would be obtained as to a possible future collaboration and also advisory on the structural framework on which this project output will be based. A meeting with the PUM Country Advisor was set up for October 2018.
- A discussion both in person and electronically was taken up with Mr. Bruce Wade, a consultant in the field of entrepreneurship and innovation and chair of a sub-committee of the Cape Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Synergy was identified with a platform being developed through the Chamber relating to an innovation enabler database with a map (www.capechamber.co.za/innovation). This platform will allow innovators to find specialists/ consultants in the broader general industry field. It was agreed that the database to be developed as part of the CHEC project would have significant synergy and a small overlap. This project is still in concept form and it is intended that it be handed over to a separate entity (Silicon Cape presently) to manage. Once this is done, a more concrete relationship will be developed.
- A second meeting was held on 26th October with the Mr. Lesley Africa (local PUM representative, the PUM country representative (Mr. Ed Heinen) and a second PUM colleague (Ms. Anna Tishina). The aim of the meeting was to establish further synergy and possible collaboration with PUM in the Western Cape. It was obvious that, with strong Dutch government support, PUM was in a far better position to provide assistance to companies in South Africa as part of their mandate to generate business in the country. A number of options for collaboration were discussed. The key outcome was the decision that there could be situations where a PUM consultant could team with a local consultant on the proposed database to service a common client. This would mean that the short PUM intervention would be carried further by the local consultant. The PUM consultant would add value in terms of expertise but also in terms of being overtly objective in terms of solutions for clients. The project team undertook to nominate at least one company where this solution could be trialled. This is still a work in progress.
- Mr. Nazeem Sterras representing the Western Cape Fine Food Initiative was eventually appointed as consultant to the project as per the plan and as per the budget line item. He has since had two meetings with ATS to discuss the project timelines as well as outputs required. The second meeting was to report on progress made in terms of the framework by which the project would be taken forward. Completion was expected by 7th December 2018. This was delayed due to the late start of the consultant referred to previously. Once the advert criteria is finalised, an advert calling for interested parties to register on the database was made in appropriate social and print media in mid-January 2019.
- A further close-out meeting was held with Mr. Sterras in February 2019.

Completion of the above steps allowed for the collation of the database and the trialling of the process, including that with PUM participation. One of the anomalies that did crop up in the process up to now is that, once the word was out, a number of individuals approached and asked to be registered. Unfortunately, most of these fell outside the “grey knowledge” concept due to relative youth and experience. However, the pressure that presented itself had resulted in a concession to be made regarding the database i.e. two well-defined categories of consultants

would be generated. This would include “young” and “grey” participants (read levels of experience in this categorisation).

D. STEPS TO COMPLETION

Since the database had been collated with vetted potential consultants, both retired and otherwise, steps have been taken to apply their skills in different instances with different SMMEs requiring such assistance. This is still in progress still since acquiring companies for the interventions posed a small challenge, after which actually securing time with SMMEs for meetings and advisories also proved to be problematic. The term problematic is used in the sense that smaller companies are usually under-resourced and usually involve active participation by the owner(s), hence securing their time is the key challenge.

With the assistance of the consultant, the following outputs were realised:

- The operational framework and related documents regarding policy and procedure was designed and applied in populating the database.
- Adverts were placed in two digital e-zines, one of which also had a print edition (Foodstuff SA and Food & Beverage Reporter, latter with a continental footprint). Additional advertising was done on 4 different web groups available to ATS as well as a blog written on the ATS website.
- In going through this process, there was no expenditure on travel;
- Fifty potential consultants were either obtained by response to adverts or by peer identification and personal approaches. As previously mentioned, there are now two outputs in this regard i.e. a database of “grey knowledge” and second, larger database of “young knowledge”. The latter database contains 84 entries.
- Unfortunately due to assumptions having been made in drawing up the original proposal, the numbers of “fully registered” consultants was not met. A total of 50 persons are listed. However only 30 of these responded positively to the call and, of these, 16 had completed and submitted relevant forms. It is expected that more of the positive respondents will fully register in due course.
- Trials were conducted with small companies by using the incoming client to ATS for services. To date though, only three have taken up the offer of services and more is expected over the next few weeks to satisfy the target of ten. This is partly due to the time of year when small companies are busy settling into the new calendar year. This will be an ongoing process and can be reported on to CHEC as it happens.
- A small challenge cropped up in that the particular consultant used wanted to know if ATS could cover his travelling costs. This was done out of ATS and not project funds (see later). A specific policy or ruling will be made in this regard for future use.
- The initial idea of partnering with other institutions to manage this database has been abandoned in favour of ATS managing it in perpetuity since there is further development to be done and much value placed on it by external parties. This includes converting the database to a web-based one which may allow interaction with the public. This concept is based on that gleaned from GreenCape, an NPO which has something similar. This is the next phase of the project.

BUDGET

To date three expense transactions were executed from an account under the jurisdiction of the Research Directorate (RK47) amounting to expenditure of R60 000.00. This included two tranches paid to the 3rd party service provider as well as R3 000.00 for advertising of the project. This leaves a surplus R6 125.00 of the original R61 625.00.

It is suggested that the balance be used to fund travel costs for consultants as more companies are assisted.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This project, although not fully meeting targets in the time used, will be further developed into a more technology savvy tool to assist SMMEs nationally. ATS will be engaging with other stakeholders in Provincial Government and the City of Cape Town e.g. Agriculture, to push the envelope. It is intended that this will also be advertised internally in Provincial Government circles. One final action to be taken is the creation of a blog post on the ATS website which will be advertised on all the websites relevant to ATS and its stakeholders. This will describe the nature of the skills and experience embedded in the consultants on the database.

END OF REPORT